# Montgomery County Council

**N**
**E**
**W**
**S**

**R**
**E**
**L**
**E**
**A**
**S**
**E**

## COUNCIL APPROVES $900,000 TO BOOST TRANSIT INCENTIVES FOR EMPLOYERS, ESTABLISH FREE BUS ROUTES TO ALLEVIATE CONGESTION

The Montgomery County Council today unanimously approved $897,510 in funding to bolster mass transit usage and alleviate congestion in highly-congested parts of the County.

The package introduces free bus service on seven Ride-On bus routes along the I-270 corridor, reduces the fares on three commuter bus routes into the County, reduces the fare of the Smart Mover route between Lakeforest Mall and Bethesda, increases promotional funding for Ride-On, and increases the funding for the County's "Fare Share" and "Super Fare Share" programs of transit incentives to employers.

The action follows up on the results of a Council-initiated survey last fall of 1,000 local commuters who drive to work alone. Half said they were willing to consider alternative transportation. Eleven percent said they would ride buses if fares were lowered to fifty cents or less.

"We need to provide additional traffic congestion relief for our residents now," said Council Vice President Steve Silverman, who first proposed the package last spring, flanked by supporters from both the business and environmental communities.

"More money for free and reduced fare buses—along with more transit incentives for employers – can pay rich dividends in helping to ease traffic congestion and parking woes. This can especially help in densely-populated areas of our County where building more roads is simply not an option."

Specifically, the proposal would:

1.      Reduce the fare of three Mass Transit Administration bus routes (cost=$133,130):

Route 991 between Frederick and Shady Grove, from more than $6 per round trip (on average) down to $2;
MTA's new route between Frederick and Rock Spring Park, down to $2 per round trip; and
MTA's new route between Westminster and Shady Grove, down to $2 per round trip.

2.   Reduce the fare of the Metrobus J8/J9 (Smart Mover) bus routes between Lakeforest Mall and Bethesda down to 50 cents/ride (cost=$144,380).

3.   Make the following Ride-On routes free (reduced revenue =$82,130):

Route 70 express between Germantown (Milestone) and Bethesda via I-270;
Route 72 express between Germantown (Commons) and Shady Grove via I-270;
Route 73 express between Germantown and Shady Grove via I-270
Route 74 between Germantown and Shady Grove via Shady Grove West;
Route 75 between Urbana and Shady Grove via Clarksburg and Germantown;
Route 77 express between Germantown (Commons) and Shady Grove via I-270; and
Route 79 express between Germantown (Dorsey Mill) and Shady Grove via I-270.

4.   Aggressively promote the free and reduced-fare routes (cost=$160,000).  The current marketing budget for the entire Ride-On program is $180,000, so these funds would nearly double the total outreach effort.

5.   Increase the "Fare Share" and "Super Fare Share" program subsidies (cost=$360,000).  Currently, the allowable tax-free transit subsidy to an employee is $65 per month.  Therefore, the maximum County subsidy under "Fare Share" is currently $32.50/month per employee (with the employer also paying $32.50/ month), while the maximum County subsidy under "Super Fare Share" is now $64/month (with the employer paying the other $1/month). Federal law calls for the non-taxable limit to be raised to $100/month. Therefore, the funds under this part of the initiative would increase the County's maximum subsidy under "Fare Share" to $50/month, and its maximum subsidy under "Super Fare Share" would be raised to $99/month.

6.   Increase marketing for the higher "Fare Share" and "Super Fare Share" subsidies (cost=$50,000).

The total cost of this proposed initiative, therefore, is $979,640, using nearly all the $1 million set-aside.  Since $82,130 of this cost is actually lost revenue to the Mass Transit Fund and not an expenditure from the Fund, the spending request is only for $897,510.
###